



In his homily Fr. Stephen spoke about the pain of grief and how it affects everyone in different ways and in particular, those who suffered a bereavement in the last year. He instanced his own personal grief following the tragic passing of his sister Marie, last year. He said that he can feel her presence around him more now than ever and that he thinks of her every day. He concluded a very poignant homily by saying "grief is painful, but we grieve because we love".

Brian Flanagan on guitar, was the soloist and his selection of music and songs perfectly encapsulated the solemnity of the occasion. At the end of the Mass, Fr. Stephen blessed the little white crosses containing the names of the deceased over the past year which were located beside the potted snowdrops in the Memorial Garden. He thanked Margie Phillips, Enda Caulfield and all who had volunteered in helping to ensure the success of the Remembrance Mass. On the following day prayers were recited in the Friary and Parish Cemeteries.

Holy Communion Preparation

The Grow in Love preparation programme for the children who will receive their First Communion next May continued at the vigil Mass on the 18th of the month. It focussed on introducing the children to the different ways during the month of November, in which our parish remembers and prays for those who have passed away. The soloist for the Mass was Magda Manke, accompanied by Ludmilla on the organ.

Children's Liturgy

The Children's Liturgy for children from 4 to 8 years took place at the 10 o'clock Mass on the last Sunday of the month. The co-ordinators were Ms. Murphy and Ms. Judge of Scoil Íosa.

DECEMBER

Advent commenced with the lighting of the first of the four candles on the advent wreath at the Vigil Mass on the 2nd of the month.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

The children of Scoil Íosa braved the wind and rain to be present for the 10 o'clock Mass on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. In an interactive homily, Fr. Stephen spoke about the importance of this feast day to the real meaning of Christmas and the birth of Jesus.

The next segment of the Grow in Love programme for the children who will celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion in 2024, went ahead at the Vigil Mass on the 9th. The emphasis was on helping children to learn how to celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. Fr. Stephen thanked the parents and guardians for organising the Mass. The soloist for the evening was Oliver Jordan.

Archbishop Francis Duffy

Archbishop Francis Duffy was the celebrant at the weekend Masses on the 16th and 17th. He was very complimentary about the beauty of our church and conveyed to Fr. Stephen his delight at the very warm reception he received from the parishioners.

Christmas

The Family Mass on Christmas Eve began with the blessing of the Crib by Fr. Stephen. Michael and Geraldine Kilcourse with their children Eva Grace and Oisín placed the image of the infant Jesus in it. The readings were done by Margaret Monaghan while Fr. Stephen spoke to the children about the importance of the crib and the role of St. Francis of Assisi in designing the first crib in 1223. After Communion, Brendan Donnellan read a beautiful reflection titled 'A Christmas Prayer' by Robert Louis Stevenson. There was a palpable sense of excitement at the end of the Mass when Santa Claus appeared to speak with the children and to leave a present for baby Jesus. The Scoil Íosa choir under the direction of Ms. Freeley, enriched what was a beautiful liturgy.

There was a festive atmosphere at the Vigil Mass at 9pm. The church with lights dimmed, looked really beautiful. The parish choir under the guidance of Martina Kelly were in full voice ably assisted by violinists Moira Delaney, Victoria Burcovski and Ita Fahey and Ludmilla Burcovski on the organ. Readings by Stella O'Neill with the Neves Family bringing the gifts of bread and wine to the altar.

The 10 o'clock Mass on Christmas Day was broadcast on Mid West Radio. The Abbey Choir with Brian Flanagan as soloist and the organist Paula Donnellan really enhanced a beautiful liturgy. The readings were done by Julia Kelly, while the gifts of bread and wine were brought to the altar by Patrick and Catherine O'Malley and their children. In his homily, Fr. Stephen focused on the birth of Jesus and the Christmas message which it brings to us – a message of peace, love, hope and healing. He said it was very regrettable that because of the War on Gaza, Christians could not celebrate the birth of the Christ child in Bethlehem.

Viktor Simeonkowski home for Christmas from St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, doubled up as soloist and organist for the 12 o'clock Mass with Maeve Donnellan doing the readings. The gifts of bread and wine were brought to the altar by the McConn Family.

Fr. Stephen thanked Margie Phillips and her team for decorating the church for the ceremonies; musical director Martina Kelly and all the choirs and soloists for enriching the liturgies; sacristan Irene and her daughter, Joycee for having everything so well prepared for all the Christmas Masses and to all who helped out in any way.

Feast of the Holy Family

The last Sunday of the month, which was also the last day of 2023, marked the Feast of the Holy Family. The 10 o'clock Mass was broadcast on Mid-West Radio with the Le Cárde group providing the music and song, which added greatly to the liturgy. The readings were read by Norma Jean Folliard.



Christmas Shoebox Appeal



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JULY

Cemetery Mass

There was a great turnout for the annual Cemetery Mass on the first Sunday of the month. The celebrant was Fr. Stephen with Mary Donnelly doing the readings and the Prayer of the Faithful. Thanks was tendered to Joe Hosty for providing the amplification and Martin Gavin for erecting the covered platform.

A very warm welcome was extended to Fr. Arul Jayaseelan from the diocese of Dindigul, Tamil Nadu in India. Fr. Arul, who is undertaking postgraduate studies in Rome, helped out in the Parish in July and August, celebrating weekend and daily Masses. Wiktor Simeonkowski returned to our Parish after his year of discernment, which he completed at St Albans College in Valladolid.



Members of Ballyhaunis Faith & Light group enjoying their summer Fiesta. Members of local music group "Le Cárde" provided music and entertainment.

Croagh Patrick Climb

Fr. Stephen was among the thousands of pilgrims that climbed Croagh Patrick on the last Sunday of July. He celebrated the 8am Mass on the summit. The Primate of All Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin, also made the ascent of the mountain and presided over the 11 o'clock Mass. The objective of this year's pilgrimage was to highlight the 'Year of Vocation' to the Diocesan Priesthood.

AUGUST

World Youth Day

Wiktor Simeonkowski was part of a group of young people from the Archdiocese of Tuam, led by Archbishop Francis Duffy, who attended World Youth Day in Lisbon on the 6th August. On that day, Pope Francis celebrated Mass before a huge gathering of young people. At the 10 o'clock Mass on the Feast of the Assumption, Wiktor spoke about his experience of World Youth Day and also about his year of discernment at St. Albans College in Spain. The Mass was celebrated by Fr. Stephen, and he was assisted by Fr. Arul and Fr. John Peyton. Fr. John, whose mother came from the parish, was home on a short break from the archdiocese of Birmingham.



Volunteers from Mary's Meals leave Ballyhaunis on foot on the final leg of their pilgrimage to Knock on August 15th.

Mary's Meals

Volunteers from Mary's Meals – a charity which provides children in some of the world's poorest communities with a hot meal every school day, arrived in Ballyhaunis on the 14th, on the final part of their sponsored walk to Knock Shrine the following day. The parish extended a very warm welcome to them with refreshments served in the Communal Centre, Clare Court and music and singing provided by Le Cárde. Sincere thanks to all who prepared the venue and served the food.

Harvest Mass

Fr. Anthony Finn, O.S.A., of the Augustinian Order, celebrated the Harvest Mass with Fr. Stephen in the Friary on Sunday the 20th. The music and singing were provided by the Abbey Choir. Great credit is due to all

who had the Friary in splendid condition for the occasion and who prepared the fruit which is synonymous with the Harvest theme.

At the 10am daily Mass on the last Friday of the month, Fr. Arul thanked Fr. Stephen and the people of the Parish for their kindness and generosity during his time in Ballyhaunis. He said that he received a very warm welcome from the community, many of whom took time out to show him the various sights in the area, while others encouraged him to participate in different events in the Parish, making it a truly enriching experience.

SEPTEMBER

World Day of Prayer for Creation

The opening day of the month was designated the World Day of Prayer for Creation. This year's theme was 'Let Justice and Peace Flow'. At the morning Mass, which coincided with the First Friday, Fr. Stephen read out a prayer for the Earth from Laudato Si. Later that day, he celebrated Mass for the residents of Brookvale Manor Nursing Home.

Best wishes were extended from our parish to Wiktor Simeonkowski as he commenced his studies for the priesthood at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Our prayers and thoughts are with him.

Joe Keane's 100th Birthday

A special Mass to mark the 100th birthday of Joe Keane of Knox Street was celebrated on Saturday 16th September. Fr. Kieran Waldron joined Fr. Stephen on the altar to mark this very special occasion. The music and singing were provided by the combined Parish and Abbey Choirs, with Paula Donnellan at the organ and Moira Delaney and Ita Fahey as violinists. Refreshments were served afterwards in the Community Hall, as parishioners turned out in big numbers to honour Joe on what was a truly momentous occasion.

An enrolment Mass took place on Saturday evening the 30th, for children from Scoil Íosa preparing for their First Holy Communion. The programme chosen by them is 'Grow in Love'. There was a fine turnout of parents and guardians. The soloist was Maga Manke, with musical accompaniment being provided by Eleana and Anatoli from Ukraine.



Joe and Marcella Keane pose for a photo following the celebration of Mass to honour Joe's 100th birthday in September.

Parish Pastoral Council

The Parish Pastoral Council convened on the second Monday in the Community Hall. Fr. Stephen spoke about the Church Refurbishment, saying that what was originally a painting job had extended to a more extensive project. He met with architects and was awaiting on update from them. He added that he will be requesting them to make a presentation to the PPC. The meeting was informed that the Parish website was up and running thanks to the diligent work of Mary Henry who brought it to a successful conclusion.

Miriam Judge and Ruth Murphy agreed to act as the co-ordinators of the Childrens Liturgy, which will be for children over the age of four. It was decided to have one mass per month. There was great response to the request for Altar Servers, with parental consent being obtained in all cases.

Fr. Stephen said that First Holy Communion will be on the 18th of May with First Confessions on the 5th of March next. There will be a 'Grow in Love' Mass on the previous Sunday, March 3rd. A discussion then ensued on how to get parents and guardians involved in the preparation of their children for the sacrament of Holy Communion. There was a consensus among members that they should participate actively in the 'Grow in Love' programme at the Masses and in the other events that are an integral part of the preparation process. It was also suggested that children attending the 'Grow in Love' programme would receive a stamp, which would be inserted on a card. Children who collected a full card would receive a gift.

OCTOBER

Season of Creation

An Ecumenical ceremony took place at the Community Garden in the Friary grounds on the first Sunday in October to celebrate the Season of Creation. This was part of a global movement for the Season of Creation, in which we pray and act to protect creation. The ceremony was presided over by Fr. Stephen and Rev. Xanthe Pratt of the Church of Ireland. Other participants included representatives from Tidy Towns, Beekeepers, Community Garden and the schools. The Blessing of Pets took place afterwards. Well done to Kevin Henry, Miriam Judge and Margaret Monaghan for organising it as members of the Parish Pastoral Council.

The children of Scoil Íosa were in attendance at the morning Mass on Wednesday 4th October, which coincided with the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron of the Environment. Moreover, it marked the conclusion of the month-long Season of Creation. The children chose the Care of Creation as the theme for the Mass. The Scoil Íosa choir provided the music and singing. Fr. Stephen expressed his gratitude to teachers, Ms. Ruane and Ms. Prendergast for the wonderful work they had put in for the Season of Creation, adding it could be viewed in Scoil Íosa.

Stations

Station Masses were held at the residences of Bernie and John Gill of Beech Park and Mary and Michael Lyons for the Lecarrow/Curries area on 20th and 21st October.



Season of Creation event, Community Garden, the Friary, Ballyhaunis, Sunday, October 1st, 2023. L-R: Rev Xanthe Pratt, Kevin Henry, Mary Donnelly, Colm Bohan, Moira Delaney, Jenny Glynn, Ita Fahey, Mary Henry.

Holy Communion Preparation

On 21st the Grow in Love programme for the children who will make their Holy Communion in 2024 continued at the Vigil Mass. The emphasis was on helping them to understand the Rosary as a special prayer said by the family, and particularly during October, which is the month dedicated to the Rosary and Our Lady.

World Mission Sunday

The theme for World Mission Sunday was Hearts on Fire, Feet on the Move. The proceeds of the collection and donations at all Masses are forwarded to support the work of the Church in the developing world, in hospitals and schools, in addition to nurturing vocations in dioceses mainly in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In his homily, Fr. Stephen commended Irish missionaries for the great work they have done in the past and continue to do right up to the present day. The soloist for the Mass was Brian Flanagan.

Church Sacristan, Irene demonstrated her versatility, when joining with her colleague Rodrigo, in the singing of a variety of Brazilian religious numbers in Portuguese, at the Vigil Mass on the concluding Saturday of the month.

Mass was broadcast on Mid-West Radio on the first 3 Sundays of the month with the Parish, Abbey and Scoil Íosa choirs present on consecutive Sundays. Once again there was a very positive response engendered from the very wide listenership.

PPC Meeting

At the Pastoral Council meeting on the 16th, all present expressed their satisfaction at the success of the 'Season of Creation' in the Friary grounds. The consensus was that there was scope to expand it in the coming years with the children playing a more prominent role in it. Fr. Stephen said that he attended the annual in-service course for the priests of the Archdiocese in Mulranny at which two speakers made presentations on the environment and climate change. PPC members discussed how they could become involved in protecting our environment and to

raise greater awareness of it. The view was that if it could engage with other groups in the area who are focusing on it, it could play a very significant part in creating greater awareness.

The question of Funeral Ministry was also highlighted and the importance of forming a team. Some names have already been put forward with Fr. Stephen saying, he would bring it up for discussion at the next Deanery meeting. The Faith and Light group held a very successful Halloween Fiesta on the previous day. There were over 20 members present, in addition to a number of new volunteers.

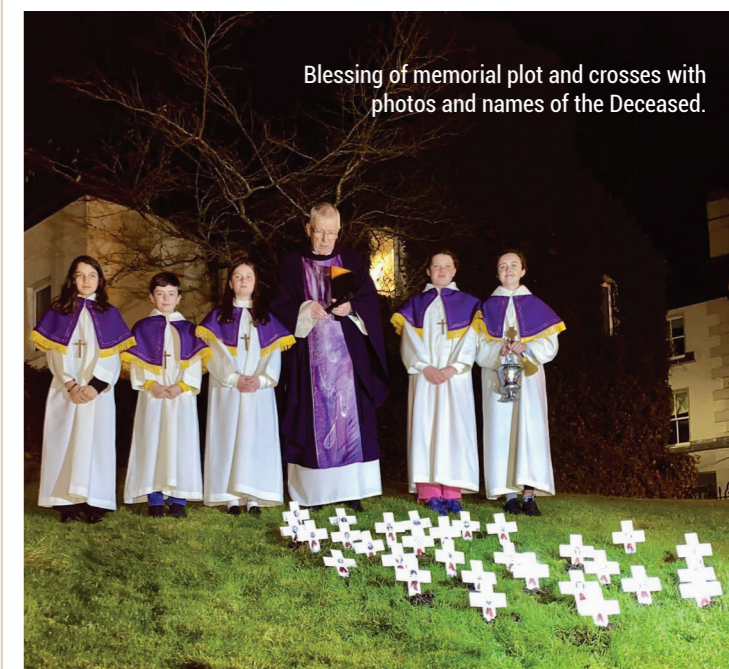
A letter was read from Archbishop Francis Duffy regarding training for PPCs, with an emphasis on the need for continuity planning so that there are new volunteers appointed as opposed to having people serving for long time period.

NOVEMBER

November is the month of the Holy Souls as we remember our deceased loved ones who are never far from our thoughts. The celebrant of the Mass on the Feast of All-Souls was Fr. John Peyton, home on a short break from his diocese in Birmingham. The envelopes containing the names of the deceased were placed on the altar and were remembered at all Masses throughout the month.

Remembrance Mass

The highlight of the month, however, was the Remembrance Mass which took place on the first Saturday and as always, there was a very big attendance. The lights were dimmed in keeping with this very solemn ceremony. Members of the congregation were invited to light a candle in memory of their deceased loved ones. The theme for the evening was *In November, We Remember*. The names of all those who passed away in the last year were read out at the start of the Mass.



Blessing of memorial plot and crosses with photos and names of the Deceased.